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ABSTRACT

Intended for retired teachers of high school or college composition or speech courses, this paper offers suggestions to retirees for setting up similar courses in corporations. The first section of the paper notes that retired instructors have skills useful to industry and gives suggestions for, among other things, formation of possible courses, class size limits, and length of the course. The second part of the paper offers a brief review of techniques for teaching technical communication courses, and suggests varied teaching techniques such as discussions, lectures, individual conferences, workshops, and homework assignments. Suggested areas of evaluation are included. In the third section, samples of a syllabus for a course in effective writing are offered, including reading and writing assignments. The final section discusses representative courses of study for an in-house technical communication course, and reports on the success of a 2-day seminar on effective technical and business writing. This section also includes the agenda and reading lists for the seminar. (Ten references are included.) (JC)

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Retirees, You've Got What It Takes: You Can Teach in Business and Industry

Retirees who taught English in high school and in college are needed to teach communication studies - Effective Writing, Effective Oral Presentations, Effective Report Writing, Effective Speech Techniques - in business and industry. As former instructors of English, retirees need not be concerned about industry's course materials because they are somewhat similar to those which the retirees have taught in either high school or college. To be specific, in a college report writing course, instructors will find that most collegians make the following errors in grammar and usage: (1) the agreement of subject and verb (2) the dangling modifier (3) the lack of parallel structure (4) the overuse of the indefinite this and it (5) the lack of subordination. Instructors in industry will have to review their students on these same five errors. Also, in a high school/college speech course, the instructor's objectives are to help the student to organize facts and ideas for oral presentations, to use visual aids effectively, to analyze audiences, and to learn the facets of body language. In a course - Effective Business Presentations - the instructor may use the same objectives and possibly the same text and similar resources of the high school/college classroom.

Instructors in industry must remember that there is no "master plan" for an inplant course, as each course has its own objectives, varied students, time allotments, teaching techniques, and other demands. However, having taught over twenty years in industry, the writer suggests that potential instructors in industry consider these facets of course structure.

1. The size of the class. For a course Effective Report Writing - a class of fifteen is an ideal number, as the instructor can give each student individual instruction. Under no circumstances should an instructor have more than thirty students, However, he may find that twenty students are a comfortable class. In a speech course the ideal number is also fifteen, but an instructor should not accept more than twenty. With this number each student will have a chance to speak each session.

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These courses should contain engineers, scientists, supervisors and managers - all from different fields because this mixture adds variety and interest to the course and gives the class a real-life situation. For both writing and speaking courses this mixture of students should be encouraged.

2. The length of the class. Class meetings should be minimally two hours. In a writing course a three-hour class may be scheduled if the third hour is used for the writing assignment. During the third hour the instructor may present the writing assignment and may supervise the writing of each student.

   If industry insists on one-hour classes, then the course must meet twice a week to give the course continuity.

   In a speech course, a three-hour class can be scheduled because the instructor may use two hours of class discussions, lectures, and workshops and one hour of student presentations before the group or vice versa.

3. Frequency and number of meetings. Most instructors in industry will agree that the best frequency of class meetings is one meeting a week. This weekly interval enables the instructor to check the assignments and to prepare resources and notes. Also, the students can complete their reading and writing assignments during the week. If possible, instructors should not teach on Fridays because the students have "weekend" responsibilities to complete on that day; and therefore, student attendance and motivation are low.

   As for the number of class meetings, six or seven weeks seem to be an ideal allotment of time. Should the class need an additional week for individual conferences or for coverage of supplementary material, the instructor can always add another week to the course.

4. The time of the course. The course should be held on company time, preferably in the morning when both the students and the instructor are psychologically fresh. Instructors should avoid the late afternoon hours of 5:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.

5. Establishment of rapport with the management and the course. The instructor should enlist the support of top management to promote the course by the announcement of the course in staff meetings, in a brochure, or in the in-house organ. Top management, middle management, and the supervisory staff should show an enthusiasm for the course and should encourage students to enroll in the course. To open the course, the President or his deputy should say a few words concerning the purposes and the objectives of the course.

6. The formation of the class. Supervisore and members of middle management will select those students eligible for the course. Some personnel will request to take the course. Ideally the course should have a variety of students who should not consider the course as a remedial one but as one to improve their writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills.

A Brief Review of Techniques of Teaching Technical Communication's Courses

The effective teaching techniques of an in-plant course should be varied: discussions, lectures, individual conferences, workshops, and homework assignments:

The instructor will find that discussions, which involve both students and teachers, are very productive and instructive; however, to accomplish this goal, the instructor must plan the discussion carefully, set the goals of the lesson, offer resources for the students, and keep the discussion

under control. On the other hand, lectures may contribute less to the learning process because the class, for the most part, is nonparticipating and passive during the lectures. One must remember that lectures can offer the most economical way to present a given amount of material in a stated allotment of time. Unless the lectures are well timed and well planned, the instructor must use a common understanding of the subject; otherwise, the lectures will not contribute much to the subject matter.

The instructor will find individual conferences with students in both the writing and the speech class to be helpful. As a suggestion, the writing instructor may request each student to keep all corrected writings in a folio. Perhaps at the end of the sixth week or at the end of the course, the instructor may request a ten-minute conference with the student and critique the various papers. During the critique the instructor should point our both the constructive aspects of the students' writings as well as the negative aspects. Also, after this instructor-student conference, students may have conferences with other students and may give their colleague an editorial critique of his folio. In this activity the teacher may serve as a referee between the two students and should interrupt the conferences only if he notes an error or an important omission of the critique.

If the instructor is teaching a course in oral communication, at the end of the fifth or sixth week he should schedule a ten-minute conference with each student. During this interval the instructor should review the over-all comments which he wrote on each student's 4x6 card, review the constructive aspects of the students' performance, and tell the student how he can improve his speech. These one-on-one conferences are very effective techniques because they individualize the instruction, because they let the student know exactly how he has progressed in his writing or speaking, because the student feels that the instructor and the course are adaptable and relevant to each individual student.

As a technique, the workshop is effective because, if planned well, it involves class participation. However, the workshop device must be supplemented and co-ordinated with the discussions, lectures, and the supplementary readings. During the workshop the instructor may assign short writing, reading, or speaking assignments. Also the instructor during the workshop session should distribute handouts, presnet summaries of the workshop, and possible coordinate the workshop with a lecture and the speaking/reading assignment.

A topic which may be coordinated with the lecture, workshop, and reading assignment may be as follows:

Topic in the lecture - The Use of Graphic Aids in Report Writing-Reference - Mills and Walter - Technical Reporting (4th Ed.).

Reading Assignment - Read Mills and Walter - "Graphic Aids"

Workshop - Use the following graphic aids, pictures, illustrations, bar graphs, line graphs in strategic areas of the report.

Prepare a "List of Figures" for the prefatory materials in the report. (See Mills and Walter, p. 380).

Homework assignments play a prominent role in inplant courses. To be specific, for each class meeting of effective writing homework should include a reading and writing assignment. This should allow the students a chance to express themselves; to practice organization, vocabulary, grammar, and format; and to supplement the lecture workshop materials with relevant examples which could not be covered in class. Reading assignments can be made from the textbooks, magazine articles, various supplemental references, or any source or sources of information which the instructor selects.

Evaluations

Instructors who teach in industry will most likely be evaluated by their students. Usually during the last hour of the course, students are given evaluation forms to be completed. For the improvement of instruction, industry needs this feedback from the class. By the collated evaluations, industry learns some of the following facets about the course:

1. The length and the time of the course.
2. The textbooks and the resources presented during the course.
3. The methods of instruction.
4. The strengths and the weaknesses of the course.
5. The student's recommendation of the course to his colleagues (an important facet of the evaluation).
6. The comforts/discomforts of the meeting room.
7. Students' suggestions for additional subject matter and resources.
8. Students' suggestions for deletions from the course.
9. Student's reactions to the entire presentation of the course.

When the evaluations have been collated, industry may ask the instructor to review the evaluation and prehaps to revise the course content, the methods of instruction, and the texts and references used in the course.

Samples for a Syllabus

The following samples offer a syllabus which can be covered in a short course five to ten weeks. However, instructors should be willing to change the assignments, textbooks, and methods of instruction according to the objectives of each course and to the backgrounds, interests, and needs of the students.

Representative Courses of Study for a
Course in Effective Writing

Instructor -

Text - Estrin, Herman A. Technical and Professional Writing: A Practical Anthology. New York: Preston Publishing Co., 1976.

Weeks 1 and 2 - Introduction to the course and a discussion of the aims of the course.

The course includes such topics as the following: the functions of written communications; the analysis of reader and writer problems; effecitve memo and letter writing; the precise use of language; clarify in writing; analysis of writing styles; critiques of reports and correspondence submitted by the participants; and the use of non-verbal communication.

The Writer and His Responsibilities to His Reader

Read TPW - Young "Responsibilities of Writers and Editors to Readers," pp. 221-232.
Racker, "Selecting and Writing to the Proper Level," pp. 236-246. and Souther, "What Management Wants in the Technical Report," pp. 246-253.

1. Discuss the identification of the reader and the analysis of his needs.
2. Discuss the following characteristics of effective writing: accuracy, brevity, clarity and readability.
3. Discuss the article, "The Need for and the Improvement of Technical Writing," The Journal of Technical Writing and Communication.
4. Discuss these principles of effective writing:
   a. Consider the level of your audience.
   b. Know the specific purpose of each writing assignment.
   c. Organize your thoughts by means of an outline.
   d. Have a thorough knowledge of the subject.

Assignment:

Week 1 - Prepare a paper which describes in detail your professional/technical specialty, or write a complete job analysis.

Week 2 - Write a paper and state six rules which will help you write clear, concise prose.

Week 3 and 4

Types of Writing: Letters, Abstracts, Memoranda, and Reports

Read TPW - Laird, "How to Start to Write a Report," pp. 25-30.
Hamlett, "Suggestions for the Preparation of Technical Papers," pp. 40-47.
Arnold, "The Writing of Abstracts," pp. 56-56.
Johnson, "How Well Do You Inform?"

1. Discuss positive and negative in Letter Writing
2. Discuss words and phrases to Avoid in Letter Writing
3. Discuss "Letters that Sell," The Royal Bank of Canada, May, 1974.
4. Discuss "Improving Style in Letter Writing."
5. Discuss "How Well Do You Inform?"
6. Discuss the Role of the Abstract

Assignment:

Week 3 - Write a form letter 250 to 300 words in which you try to convince the readers to perform some action such as coming to a meeting for a cause of common interest, joining in some program such as weed control or control of a tree disease in the area, attempting to obtain some municipal involvement, or joining some organization. As an alternative, you might solicit pledges or contributions to support some program or activity. The subject should be a matter of lively interest in your home, community, or, profession.

Week 4 - Write a 200-word abstract of "Letters that Sell," May, 1974, or "How Well Do You Inform?"

Note the Positive Words

appreciate	excellent	prestige	thank you
benefit	faith	recommend	thoughtful
capable	friendly	reliable	
commendable	grateful	service	
cooperate	notable	sincerity	
efficient	please	success	

Week 5 and 6

Word Choice, Usage, and Graphic Aids

Read TPW - Sullivan, "Words —Tools of Thought," pp. 97-105.
Swain, "Giving Power to Words," pp. 185-190.
Bolton, "The Art of Writing," pp. 177-184.

Conferences with students to review all written work.

1. Discuss "Glossary of Words Commonly Misused."
2. Discuss the effective use of graphic aids.
3. Discuss "Troublesome Spots in Writing."
   a. dangling modifiers
   b. subordination
   c. parallelism
   d. agreement of subject and verb
   e. the use of indefinite this and it
4. Discuss punctuation:
   a. comma
   b. semicolon
   c. colon
   d. dash
   e. parentheses
   f. hyphen
   g. apostrophe

Assignment:

Write an analysis of the style of your writing. Examine at least six to ten pieces of writing that you have done recently. Analyze your style according to some of these elements of style:

- precise use of words
- variety of sentences
- sentence length
- paragraph length
- grammar and usage
- punctuation

Answer these questions:

Do you use parallel structure effectively?

Do you avoid the use of the indefinite this?

Do you avoid dangling modifiers?

Do your subjects agree with your verbs in number and person?

OR: Write an analysis of a Port Authority publication. Use the above guidelines.

Week 7 and 8

Style in Technical and Professional Writing

Read TPW - Michaelson, "Creative Aspects of Engineering Writing," pp. 8-13 and "Clarity in Technical Writing," pp. 48-51.
Freedman, "The Seven Sins of Technical Writing," pp. 139-148
Boynton, "How Well Do You Write?" pp. 255-260

1. Discuss the scientific attitude in writing, precise use of words, eye relief, sentence variety, paragraph development, the four most common usage errors made by engineers and scientists.
2. Discuss "An Approach to Style," The Elements of Style.

Assignment:

Write an analysis of a scientific/technical magazine. Use the attached guidelines.

Representative Courses of Study for an In-House Technical Communication Course

Industry realizes that effective reports and letters are vital to the success of its many projects and to the efficient use of management's time. Even though some engineers have proficiency in reporting information, their education in this area may have been thirty, twenty, or ten years ago. For this reason these engineers need an updated seminar. Many younger engineers have had no formal training in technical communication and therefore need an in-service course to offer them modern technical reporting skills.

This specific course was presented to twenty engineers of a large industrial company with expenditures of approximately a billion dollars a year. To prepare a relevant, practical course, the instructor requested non-confidential letters and reports written by each student. He critiqued these reports and letters and then wrote this course as a two-day seminar - Effective Technical and Business Writing. In an attractive room set up in horse-shoe style, the seminar met at the plant from 8:30 A.M. - 5:30 P.M. for two consecutive days.

So that the students have an orientation of the two-day seminar before classes met, they were given these references, reading assignments, and objectives of the course:

REFERENCES

Estrin, Herman A. Technical and Professional Writing: A Practical Anthology. New York: Preston Publishing Company, 1976.

Estrin, Herman A. et al. Chemical Engineering Handbook for Reporting Information. Newark, New Jersey : New Jersey Institute of Technology, 1978.

Mills, Gordon and John Walter. Technical Writing. (5th Edition) New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1985.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

For Session I - Read the following articles in Estrin's Technical and Professional Writing.

Improving Technical Writing, pp. 221-225
About Style in Writing, pp. 126-134
Giving Power to Words, pp. 185-190
Sentence and Word Length in Scientific Writing, pp 191-193
Engineers Can Write Better: The Long and the Short of It. pp. 203-220

For Session II - Design That Report! pp. 225-229
Responsibilities of Writers to Editors, pp. 229-233
Selecting and Writing to the Proper Level, pp. 236-246
What Management Wants in a Technical Report, pp. 246-253

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

1. To improve the style of technical writing.
2. To present scientific/technical information professionally.
3. To organize and to outline technical information logically.
4. To adapt the technical writing to the reader.
5. To capture and to retain the reader's interest and attention.
6. To use precise language in technical writing.
7. To present management with technical information in a coordinated, concise manner.
8. To prepare a report in a professional style.
9. To learn the current trends in letter and memoranda writing.
10. To present graphic aids in a report in a logical, relevant manner.

An Overview of the Contents of the Seminar

DAY 1

8:30 A.M. - 9:00 A.M. Discussion of the overview and the objectives of the seminar

9:00 A.M. - 12:00 Noon How to Improve the Style of Technical Writing

- Reader adaptation
- Precise use of words
- Sentence structure and length
- Paragraph structure and length
- Common errors in grammar and usage
- Punctuation and mechanics
- Use of Updated References for the Writer (Reference: Harbrace Handbook)

12:00 Noon - 1:00 P.M. LUNCH

1:00 P.M. - 2:30 P.M.	Current Trends in Business Letter Writing
2:30 P.M. - 3:30 P.M.	Presentation of Errors in Contract Writing and Its Negative Impact on the Company
3:30 P.M. - 4:30 P.M.	Discussion of the Objectives of Weekly Reports and Contract Letters and Other Documents
4:30 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.	Critiques - Students' writing of weekly reports, letters, contracts, and informal memos will be placed in an opaque projector. The instructor and the students will critique these writings concerning the facets of style listed above.

DAY II

8:30 A.M. - 9:30 A.M.	Review of the information in Session I
9:30 A.M. - 12:00 Noon	How to Make a Report Look Professional. Discussion of the following items: - Prefatory materials - Title Page - Letter of Transmittal - Table of Contents - Abstracts - Headings and Subheadings - Documentation of Materials - The Use and the Presentation of Graphic Aids
12:00 Noon - 1:00 P.M.	LUNCH
1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.	Writing Memos and Reports to Management. Discussion of the handout "Writing for Your Audience"
3:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.	Individual Conferences and consultations. Critiques of students' writings via the opaque projector. Evaluation of the course.

The evaluation form was distributed to the students immediately at the end of the course. To the question - Would you recommend this course to your colleagues? Unanimously all the respondents agreed. Some even suggested that a similar seminar be designed for the secretaries and for the supervisors of this organization. All students agreed that both the handouts and the texts were value for references and that the instruction and the organization of the seminar were excellent. When asked - What phases of the course were most beneficial?, the students answered in descending order the following: (1) critiques of letters, reports, and memos; (2) the improvement of the style of technical writing, especially the common errors in usage (3) the review of punctuation. However, in their evaluation most students suggested that the seminar should be longer, possibly three all-day sessions.

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